

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**\$4.6 Million Fine Proposed Against Los Angeles County
Sanitation Districts for 800,000-Gallon Sewage Spill**

***January 2006 Spill Closed Nine Miles of Shoreline,
Cost Local Economy Over \$1 Million***

Los Angeles, CA--The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board staff has proposed the board fine the County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County \$4.6 million for 841,490 gallons of raw sewage spilled early this year. The unauthorized release occurred in Manhattan Beach and Hermosa Beach. The January 15, 2006 sewage spill lasted for over 15 hours and threatened underlying groundwater, resulted in hazardous bacteria levels along nearly nine miles of shoreline for four days and closed popular beach areas for an additional 23 days. The release is a violation of the *California Water Code*. Under provisions of the *Code*, the maximum fine is more than \$8.4 million, however staff consider the proposed amount to be consistent with the facts of the case.

The sewage spill resulted from the failure of the District's pumping plant located at 2616 The Strand in Manhattan Beach. The plant failure caused sewage to backup and flow out of six manholes along the shoreline. Approximately 776,773 gallons of untreated wastewater seeped into the ground and 64,717 gallons flowed across area beaches and entered the Pacific Ocean.

"The harm caused by this spill was significant and very regrettable," said David Nahai, Chair of the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. "It fouled the beaches and air and put at risk public health. The spill closed several of our world-famous beaches and was broadcast nationwide. The local economic impact has been estimated to be well in excess of \$1 million. It also threatened aquatic habitat and the animals that depend upon it for food and shelter."

To prevent human exposure to coliform and other harmful substances, approximately nine miles of shoreline were closed for four days and 113,500 square feet of beach area at six different spill sites were closed for an additional 23 days. Exposure to coliform can cause human illness, including gastroenteritis.

To remove the sewage that reached the beach, emergency crews constructed sand berms to contain the wastewater and used vacuum trucks and portable pumps to collect and transport it. Dry chlorine was applied to the sand at certain locations to kill bacteria. Immediately following the spill, the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services closed nine miles of shoreline, from Dockweiler Beach south to Malaga Cove. Except for a small number of beach areas in Manhattan Beach, the Department opened the beaches on January 18, 2006. The remaining beach areas were opened two days later. On January 26th beach sand was tested to confirm that cleanup activities were complete. Unacceptable levels of bacteria were found in the deeper sand at a number of spill sites in Manhattan Beach. These areas were again closed to allow treating of the sand to a depth

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of three feet. Subsequent bacteriological testing found that the sanitizing efforts were successful and the beach areas were again opened on March 22, 2006.

The *California Water Code* authorizes fines for the unauthorized discharge of raw sewage to a water body. Following statutory provisions, the District is being fined \$4,671,318, which includes the following:

- \$8,000 for 1 day of unauthorized discharge of raw sewage on January 15, 2006
- \$509,736 for the discharge of 64,717 gallons of raw sewage to the Pacific Ocean
- \$3,107,092 for the discharge of 776,773 gallons of raw sewage to groundwater
- \$1,041,450 for negative economic impacts
- \$5,040 for administrative costs

Fines collected for violation of the *California Water Code* are deposited in the Cleanup and Abatement Account, managed by the State Water Resources Control Board. This account pays for environmental cleanups throughout California. Under certain circumstances, the entity paying the fine can choose to have a portion of the penalty used to fund a Supplemental Environmental Program (SEP) that benefits the area harmed by the unlawful activity. The District could allocate a maximum of \$2,335,659 of its penalty to fund a SEP. The Regional Water Board must approve a SEP before its funding.

The District has 90 days to request a reconsideration of the violations and penalties. The L.A. Regional Water Board will formally consider the fine in October.

The Los Angeles Water Board is one of nine regional boards in the State. Among its principal duties, the Board sets region-wide water quality standards and waste discharge requirements, enforces both federal and state clean water statutes, regulates cleanup of sites which pose an immediate or potential threat to water quality and educates the public on water quality issues. The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board is comprised of nine individuals, each of whom is appointed by the Governor, and a small professional staff, comprised mostly of scientists, engineers and geologists.

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